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TELLING AS DENOUEMENT IN CHARLES DICKENS'S *GREAT EXPECTATIONS* AND ROBERTO ARLT'S *EL JUGUETE RABIOSO* [MAD TOY][1]

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If a story is a succession of events, then the ultimate of these invariably is its telling. Indeed, narration can be considered a culminating act. This essay takes up two tales in which a narrator recounts the (de)formative experiences of youth viewed through the wistful prism of adulthood. Neither is a *Bildungsroman*; no accommodation is made or lesson garnered. Both Charles Dickens's Pip (*Great Expectations*, 1861) and Roberto Arlt's Silvio (*Mad Toy*, 1926) relate failure. These protagonists' redemption is not found in the stories they relate, rather in the relation of their stories. I will argue that each of these "defeated" narrators wrests control of an abject past, paradoxically, by way of demoralizing memoirs. This is achieved through the insertion of self-reflexive and text-reflexive cues that ever promote the cult of the narrator. An adult Pip and an adult Silvio organize data, voice opinions, control and create, thereby vindicating themselves despite dismal events confided. The axis of the telling is continually asserted, an insinuation that present has vanquished past. My investigation enlists the narratological topology of Gérard Genette. I also explore a fascinating Dickensian influence on Arlt as detailed by the latter in his *aguafuertes*, or etchings, written for the Argentine tabloid *El mundo*.

As noted, both novels present a temporal space between events and the "first-person" recounting of these events years later. For purposes of contrast, I will focus on the earliest sections of each novel, to wit, the first of *Mad Toy*'s four chapters, titled "Los ladrones" [Thieves], when Silvio is an adolescent burglar in Buenos Aires, and Pip's earliest childhood memories as a young boy living in a village on the Kent marshes. The gap between action and narration is more documentable in *Great Expectations* due to its frequent mention of time markers such as fresh gadgets, new architecture, and historical events, as well as extra-textual references. David Paroissien provides an invaluable time line for the novel's occurrences in his *The Companion to Great Expectations* (Appendix One 423–34). The action initiates in 1803 when Pip is five or six years of age and is told by him at least as late as 1860–1, when he would be in his mid-sixties.[2]

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Paroissien deduces the instance of narration through the novel's allusions to Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species* and Samuel Smiles's *Self-help*, both published in 1859, as well as a Chatham prison riot occurring on February 12, 1861 and incorporated into the text. Dickens's working notes show that he had carefully considered the plot's temporal unity despite the peculiar exigencies of nineteenth-century installment writing (Paroissien, Appendix Two, 483–6). Serialized novels were commonly launched with much fanfare before the writers themselves knew how they would end.

Paroissien's sundry calculations imply the passage of nearly six decades in Pip's life, spanning his evolution from an uncomprehending tyke to the reminiscent graybeard that eventually tells his story. Young Pip is evinced through a strategy of focalization, i.e., the prism through which a novel's events are provided. It should be commented at once that the narrating agency and the focalizing agency do not necessarily coincide even when they are younger and older versions of the same character. Succinctly, the two Pips are not to be conflated. Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan addresses this danger: "focalization and narration are separate in so-called first-person retrospective narratives" (73). She differentiates between Pip the adult narrator versus Pip the child focalizer.

Pip's role as focalizing agent is often emphasized spatially. He is a minuscule tot dwarfed by his sister, Mrs. Joe, who can easily lift him, and by her husband, the blacksmith, Joe Gargery, described as "a sort of Hercules."

> She concluded by throwing me—I often served her as a connubial missile—at Joe, who, glad to get hold of me on any terms, passed me on into the chimney and quietly fenced me up there with his great leg. (9; ch. 2)

The convict Magwitch similarly miniaturizes Pip when he seizes the young boy reading his parents' tombstone:

> He gave me a most tremendous dip and roll, so that the church jumped over its own weathercock. Then, he held me by the arms, in an upright position on the top of the stone (6; ch. 1)

The angle of perception is always up: a young Pip gazing skyward at people to study their expressions and divine their perhaps-malicious intentions. Because Pip's experience is circumscribed by rural marshland life, he must analyze every new turn of events within that limited phenomenological context. Accordingly, when he watches the escaped convict eat, a family mascot serves as metaphor in the description:

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> I had often watched a large dog of ours eating his food; and I now noticed a decided similarity between the dog's way of eating and the man's. The man took strong sharp sudden bites, just like the dog. He swallowed, or rather snapped up, every mouthful, too soon and too fast; and he looked sideways here and there while he ate, as if he thought there was danger in every direction, of somebody's coming to take the pie away. He was altogether too unsettled in his mind over it, to appreciate it comfortably, I thought, or to have anybody to dine with him, without making a chop with his jaws at the visitor. In all of which particulars he was very like the dog. (19; ch. 3)

In this portrait, the verbs "noticed" and "thought" confirm that the observation is focalized through the child Pip, and the adverb "now" clearly sets the contemplation then, rather than at the instance of narration. Although the narrator's vocabulary is certainly not young Pip's, the artless scrutiny is. Accordingly, Pip's puzzlement over local argot confirms lexically his role as focalizer. For example, he misconstrues the expression to be "brought up by hand" (8; ch. 2) as meaning corporal punishment—a natural mistake in his case—when it in fact means to be bottle fed, not breast fed, his mother evidently having died at his birth.

Meanwhile, the sexagenarian narrator Pip reasserts himself through frequent mood cues such as the reflective "I think" (27; ch. 4); the nostalgic "I have a lively remembrance" (42; ch. 7); the pensive "I believe" (5; ch. 1); the deferential "I beg to observe" (67; ch. 9); and the vacillating "I almost doubt" (65; ch. 9). Occasionally he becomes rueful: "I suppose myself to be better acquainted than any living authority, with the ridgy effect of a wedding-ring, passing unsympathetically over the human countenance" (52; ch. 7), an apparent allusion to buffetings at the hand of his sister, but perhaps also to his solitude as a lifelong bachelor. He also waxes philosophical: "Conscience is a dreadful thing when it accuses man or boy" (12; ch. 2).

These declaratory verbs and offered opinions, in their sum, constitute a veritable litany of volition through which the aged Pip conjures a cult of personality. He takes retroactive possession of his past through its on-page rumination and narrative refashioning. Pip cannot alter events historically—what happened *happened*—however, he can do so historiographically through omission, emphasis, self-aggrandizement as teller, and inscription of his story's telling into his story. His ultimate act is not the final page farewell to Estella, rather the narration itself. Pip, belatedly, authors his life.

This absorption of storytelling into story becomes more obvious upon examination of several narrator statements that reach temporally

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beyond the novel's putative plot. Pip describes Miss Havisham as "the strangest lady I have ever seen" (56; ch. 8). He also remarks, "I have often thought since" (59; ch. 8). Likewise, "Since that time, which is far enough away by now" (15; ch. 2). Such comments deliberately extend the story to the "now" of its narration.

Let us turn to *Mad Toy* and see how Roberto Arlt's narrative strategy resembles that of Dickens. Although the novel also contains a "first-person" narrator (or autodiegetic narrator, to use Genette's terminology, 245) whose comments are heavily nostalgic, there is no expansive period of retrospection as seen in *Great Expectations*. Certain clues limit the instance of narration to within ten years of Silvio's final-chapter betrayal of his friend Rengo and his decision to relocate to Patagonia. *Mad Toy*'s principal plot, meanwhile, telescopes into four years—each chapter representing a year in Silvio's life. The protagonist specifically states his age in the first three of four chapters. He is 14 years old in "Los ladrones" (87) [Thieves]; 15 in "Los trabajos y los días" (127) [Works and Days]; 16 in "El juguete rabioso" (170) [Mad Toy]; and, though unspecified, it is logical that in "Judas Iscariote" [Judas Iscariot] he would be 17.

Whereas the book's historical references do not compare in number and consistency with those of *Great Expectation*'s, the plot's backdrop does generally conform to real events. For example, Silvio relates an anecdote regarding his childhood friend Enrique that takes place "por los tiempos en que el esforzado Bonnot y el valerosísimo Valet [sic] aterrorizaban a París" (91; ch. 1) [in those times when brave Bonnot and heroic Valet terrorized Paris], thus establishing the boy's activities as contemporaneous with a Parisian spree of anarchist bank robberies in 1911 or 1912. Evidently the library heist occurs shortly thereafter, for Enrique gushes, "Bonnot desde el infierno debe aplaudirnos" (111; ch. 1) [Bonnot must be applauding us from hell]. Gang leader Jules Bonnot died in a shootout with Parisian police on April 28, 1912.

Likewise, Rengo's dream of escaping to Europe temporally situates the action: "Allí los que saben bailar el tango se casan con millonarias... y yo me voy a ir, Rubio, me voy a ir" (221; ch. 4) [Over there, guys that can dance tango marry dames worth millions... and I'm goin', Blondie, I'm gonna go]. Nelson Bayardo writes that while it is difficult to pinpoint when the tango arrived in Paris:

> resulta indiscutible que el auge del fenómeno tanguero en la capital francesa tuvo lugar en el momento que antecede a la primera guerra mundial, entre 1912 y 1913, o sea, ya hacia el final de la Belle Époque. (137–38)

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> [unquestionably, the tango phenomenon reached its apogee in the French capital between 1912 and 1913, before World War I, or roundabout the close of the Belle Époche.]

Many Argentines made a living in Paris as tango teachers, although it was not the gold mine that it appeared to be. Bayardo chronicles:

> Fue así que proliferaron los *profesores de tango* en la capital francesa, tanto que la competencia transformó el trabajo en negocio ruinoso y muchos debieron volverse, lo que no impidió que continuara la *tangomanía* con su *hora tango*, *falda tango* y hasta *color tango*. (original italics, 140)

> [Thus, *tango professors* proliferated in the French capital, so much so that competition transformed the job into a ruinous business and many [Argentines] had to return, which did not impede the ongoing *tangomania* with its *tango hour*, *tango skirt*, and even *tango color*.]

In any case, it is difficult to imagine Rengo—lame as his name implies—in that role. Rita Gnutzmann sees Rengo's quixotic scheme as compatible with a Europe circa 1925–1928, when singer Carlos Gardel was the rage there. However, as she assiduously notes, that interpretation would push the novel's action up to its 1926 publication date, leaving no room for "el tono ligeramente nostálgico y a ratos irónico del narrador" (32) [the narrator's lightly nostalgic and at times ironic tone].

Meanwhile, the Argentine conservatives' apparent fall from power toward the middle of the book meshes neatly with the defeat of conservative president Roque Sáenz Peña by the Radical Party's Hipólito Yrigoyen in the 1916 election. The foregoing markers as well as additional corroborating data included in this essay's Appendix imply that *Mad Toy*'s action occurs approximately between 1911 and 1916 or 1917, barely exceeding the year-per-chapter pattern noted earlier. Gnutzmann concurs:

> los cuatro años de la novela habrá que situarlos hacia principios de este siglo, más en concreto antes de 1916. (32)

> [the novel's four years are probably situated toward the beginning of this century and, more concretely, before 1916].

At any rate, if we assign *Mad Toy*'s November 1926 publication date as the narration's outside temporal marker, then Silvio can be no younger than eighteen and no older than twenty-nine when he sets

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down his "memoirs."[3] Logically, however, sufficient time must elapse for the narrator to become nostalgic about his adolescence and cynical about the way his life has played out.

Indeed, Silvio retreats at regular intervals from his teen-hood tale, repositioning himself in a vaguely defined adult present. These seemingly improvised returns to the now of the narration divert reader interest to the teller and the act of telling. They communicate themselves in a number of ways, the simplest being a reversion to the present tense. For example: "grato me es recordarla " (92; ch. 1) [it pleases me to recall]; "No recuerdo por medio de qué sutilezas y sinrazones llegamos a convencernos de que robar era acción meritoria y bella; pero sí sé que de mutuo acuerdo, resolvimos organizar un club de ladrones" (97–8; ch. 1) [I can't remember by what deceits and fallacies we were able to convince ourselves that thievery was a beautiful and meritorious act; but I do know that by mutual accord we resolved to organize a band of thieves]; and, "De aquella última noche azarosa conservo lúcida memoria" (108; ch. 1) [Of that last risky night I retain a clear memory].

The protagonist's use of the present tense is not unequivocal, for he also employs a "historical present" to relate past events. On occasion, it remains ambiguous whether he refers to current sentiments or is focalizing through the adolescent Silvio, or both. His melancholy description of life in don Gaetano's antiquarian bookshop provides a case in point: "Ya no tengo ni encuentro palabras para pedir misericordia. Baldía y fea como una rodilla desnuda es mi alma" (153; ch. 2). [Now I have not, nor can I find, words to beg mercy. My soul is as bald and ugly as a naked knee.] This temporal fuzziness distracts attention from the novel's content and champions its form. More to the point, the narrator asserts himself as mover and shaker.

Silvio-narrator thrusts himself into the tale by way of frequent nostalgic outbursts. He intensifies this recourse with exclamation points. Two examples: "Qué nuevo mundo pintoresco descubrí en la casa de la familia Irzubeta!" (94; ch. 1) [What a new and picturesque world I discovered in the house of the Irzubeta family!] and "Ah! Y qué sabrosísimos comentarios, qué cristiana reflexiones se podían escuchar de las comadres que, en conciliábulo en la carnicería del barrio, comentaban piadosamente la existencia de sus vecinos" (95; ch. 1) [Oh! And what delectable commentary, what Christian reflections were to be heard from the local women that held council in the butcher's shop and piously discussed their neighbors' lives]. These histrionic evocations of a gilded past clash with Silvio's recounting of coarse jobs, sordid encounters, and ultimate betrayal. His penchant for fervid reminiscence becomes a curious tic that eventually undermines the tale's continuity, or better said, extends

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the tale beyond its supposed finish up to the instance of narration. Taking a page from Pip, Silvio fuses his youthful past to an adult present through temporal adverbs like "después" [then], "aún ahora" [even now], "jamás" [never], and "más tarde" [later], or through entire phrases: "De dónde provenía esta certeza ilógica que después ha guiado todos los actos de mi vida" (192; ch. 3) [What is the source of this illogical certainty that has since guided all the acts of my life]?

Rita Gnutzmann discusses Silvio's unique position:

> Por una parte, es el personaje principal de la acción (sujeto del enunciado); por otra, es él quien hace el relato retrospectivo (sujeto de la enunciación). Esta doble función, entre cuyas dos facetas media una diferencia temporal importante, le sitúa en una posición privilegiada, cercana a la del narrador omnisciente. (39)
>
> [On one hand, he is the action's principal character (the announced subject); on the other, he is the one that makes the story retrospective (the announcing subject). This double function, whose two facets are mediated by a very important temporal difference, situates him in a privileged position, near that of an omniscient narrator.]

Both protagonists suffer the stigma of class and they knock heads against socio-economic hierarchies. Pip plays by the rules, advancing professionally within acceptable English Victorian guidelines. He could not have broken free, however, without financial assistance from Magwitch and Miss Havisham. No such boons go to Silvio. Defiant, he tilts toward delinquency—and probably anarchism. Whereas he capitulates outwardly in a series of belittling jobs, his reputation as autodidact and inventor paints him as a likely terrorist at the air force academy. During an interview there, Silvio expresses fondness for Baudelaire, Dostoyevsky and Baroja, prompting this sequence:

> —Che, no será anarquista éste?
> —No, señor capitán. No soy anarquista. Pero me gusta estudiar, leer. (170)
>
> [—Man, could this one be an anarchist?
> —No, captain. I'm no anarchist. But I like to study, to read.]

Later, his former friend and now agent Lucio grills Silvio half seriously:

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> —Vos no fabricás explosivos? No te enojés; como eras tan aficionado a las bombas de dinamita...
> Irritado de sus preguntas insidiosas, le miré con fijeza.
> —Estás por meterme preso? (original ellipses, 200)
>
> [—You don't make explosives, do you? Don't get upset; you being so keen on bombs and dynamite...
> Irritated by his sly questions, I fixed a stare on him.
> —Are you going to put me under arrest?]

Although the adult Silvio stops short of endorsing anarchist behavior, his apparent cynicism about institutions, their strictures and enforced mediocrity, belie an understanding, if not sympathy, for nihilist tactics.[4]

It should be emphasized that Silvio's adolescence is part of a greater tale that reaches to the instance of the telling. Whereas the protagonist reveals nothing substantive about himself following Rengo's betrayal, events obviously ensue during that blank decade up to the novel's moments of retrospection. (As will be recalled, Pip had even lengthier, undivulged experiences in Cairo as a trading company partner before finally relating his memoirs.) Silvio's state of mind has evolved despite the dearth of recent autobiographical news. Even if he has meanwhile "regenerated himself," as Lucio advises in Darwinian terms, "—La *struggle for life*, che...unos se regeneran, otros caen...¡así es la vida!" (original English, italics and ellipses, 202; ch. 4) [—The *struggle for life*, man...some regenerate themselves...others fall...that's life!], and can pass for a member of twenties Argentine mainstream, his early cynicism has festered and it filters into the tale he tells. This adult narrator does not throw real bombs, but he affronts the sensibilities of the middle class by satirizing their banal, anonymous existence.

Silvio sheds that same anonymity by manifesting the power and prerogative of his literary office. He is narrator. His story is mortifying, yes, but it is his story and he tells it to his liking. The pitiful episodes are immutable; however, he controls their array, availing himself of infinite arrangement potential. His narrative arsenal boasts prominently what Genette calls "duration," i.e., a narrator's acceleration or deceleration of the story's exposition. This effect manifests itself through variations in the ratio of Narrative Time (NT) to Story Time (ST).[5] Silvio's repeated interventions, by way of asides and reminders of the narrative present, impede story time and prolong narrative time. Eventually the two times coalesce, the narration becoming part of the story. More significantly, because of its final position in terms of plot, the narrating instance becomes the de facto denouement. The narrator triumphs through his relation of the story.

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Silvio's interjections suggest that he may have reached a scornful truce with society. As a fourteen-year-old, his heroes were French anarchists and the rocambolesque figures of serialized novels. His adult rebellion is presumably more practical, more closeted, more literary. Critic Vicky Unruh describes this merger of the two Silvios:

> While the narrating self remains elusively situated in time and place, the acting Silvio provides the story's primary center of consciousness. But the two come together in the protagonist's ultimate emergence as an artist defined by his talent for creative fabrication and a critical outlook on his world. (84)

During the amorphous period between events and their future divulgement, the narrator seizes the opportunity to reformulate and reedit his story. Silvio, at his whim, can embellish or minimize, or even suppress awkward details. He can cut and paste his life. His autodiegetic (inside-the-account) position offers a unique perspective. However, in accordance with Gnutzmann's earlier comments, the passage of time endows him with quasi-omniscience generally limited to heterodiegetic (outside-the-account) narrators. Of course, Pip-narrator enjoys that same privilege.

As remarked at the outset, both *Great Expectations* and *Mad Toy* share the leitmotif of shame and its mitigation. Pip's very nickname, an abbreviated palindrome of Pirrip, suggests an insignificant seed. Similarly, Silvio personifies an angry toy—a *juguete rabioso*—resentful for having been stymied by a closed socio-economic system. Paradoxically, the protagonists Pip and Silvio must textualize their humiliation in order to alleviate it. Pip's disgrace proceeds from his provincial beginnings, his mistreatment at the hands of his older sister, and his cruel, ongoing rejection by Estella. He offsets the problem of origin through his resurrection as a "gentleman," and, as an adult narrator, he lampoons his sister's meanness. However, Pip's abasement by Estella scars him emotionally and relegates him to an unwanted bachelorhood. The narrator's great hurt is apparent in the following sequence, which like that depicting Magwitch earlier, compares man to animal:

> She came back, with some bread and meat and a little mug of beer. She put the mug down on the stones of the yard, and gave me the bread and meat without looking at me, as insolently as if I were a dog in disgrace. I was so humiliated, hurt, spurned, offended, angry, sorry—I cannot hit upon the right name for the smart—God knows what its name was—that tears started to my eyes. The moment they sprang there, the girl looked at me with a quick delight in having been the cause of them. (61; ch. 8)

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The aged Pip assuages such childhood traumas by reconstituting them into a narrative that displays his strong authorship. While, logically, an unbroken sequence of time connects the two Pips, they are and are not the same person. A possible mutation is suggested by gaps in the story's chronology. No events are recounted from the period beginning in 1821 and ending when Pip returns to Kent in 1832. A still larger lacuna exists between 1832 and Pip's writing his memoirs in 1860–61. These omitted years comprise more than half of Pip's life. Although a crucial break of time and space separates the Pip that sees from the Pip that reports, both figures operate within the story. By implication, the narrating act is the last in a series of acts that constitute his account.

While Silvio likewise cannot forget the embarrassments he endures as an adolescent, this does not preclude his achieving, by the time of the telling, a measure of success on society's terms. That information is not reported, unlike Pip's disclosure of professional ascent. Regardless of Silvio's adult standing, his disaffection permeates the text. Diana Guerrero, in her investigation of Arlt, posits a sociological rationale for Silvio's self-advertized humiliation:

> La interiorización de su imagen social—para él, el despojo de sí mismo—lo hace sentirse humillado.
> ...Mostrarse como un humillado significa probar que no renunció a sus derechos humanos y, a la vez, que es consciente de no realizarlos. Su orgullo lo obliga, por lo tanto, a no olvidarse ni por un momento de su humillación. (14)
>
> [The interiorization of his social image—for him, a dispossession of self—causes him to feel shamed.
> ...By presenting himself as shamed, he proves that he has not renounced his individual rights and, at the same time, is conscious of not having achieved them. His pride, therefore, obliges him to not forget his shame, even for a second.]

Sometimes Silvio reflects nostalgically upon his adolescent dreams of banditry and poetry as if they had been abandoned long ago:

> [Oh, ironía! y yo era el que había soñado en ser un bandido grande como Rocambole y un poeta genial como Baudelaire!] (135; ch. 2)
>
> [What irony! And it was I that dreamed of being a great bandit like Rocambole and a brilliant poet like Baudelaire!]

However, his lament rings ingenuous for, like the rogue Rocambole,[6]

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Silvio exposes the superficiality of a culture based on costume and performance, and like the symbolist Baudelaire,[7] he composes a text that looks past dreary reality to an idealized world. Silvio's narration, like Pip's, simultaneously evokes and revokes his shame.

As demonstrated, the narrators of *Great Expectations* and *Mad Toy* have recourse to "present tense" utterances, opinions, asides and regrets to stamp their current psyches onto past events. This maneuver is not a digression from the story—on the contrary, it is the story's final chapter. The frequent allusion to the telling act is a jump forward in plot. These two novels are exemplary in that regard. However, every narrative bears a whiff of the teller's present, even when obfuscated by unremitting use of the "past tense" or by a teller that hides behind heterodiegetic anonymity. Genette remarks: "It seems evident that the narrating can only be subsequent to what it tells" (216). More to the point, without the act of telling, a story does not exist. The maximum moment, the final vindicating act, is the narration itself. As such, the telling of the tale is the unraveling, or denouement, of every story.

Finally, it is not clear whether Arlt read *Great Expectations* before writing *Mad Toy*, or ever. However, he does cite *The Pickwick Papers* and *A Tale of Two Cities* in several *aguafuertes*, or journalistic sketches, written during the late 1920s for the tabloid *El Mundo*. In one of them he relates "todas las tardes leo cincuenta páginas de un autor que suele ser Baroja o Dickens" [every afternoon I read fifty pages of an author that is usually Baroja or Dickens].[8] What, then, did Arlt learn from Dickens?

As I have argued, Arlt likely saw the value of highly subjective narration, temporal ambiguity, and the teller's fallible memory: all Dickens's strong suits. Critic and compiler Daniel Scroggins sheds further light on this apprenticeship:

> Es en las novelas de Dickens donde Arlt "aprende a ver" a los personajes pintorescos de su propia ciudad, a los desgraciados que se desloman por unos centavos y a los grandes solitarios que se alejan del contacto humano. El Londres misterioso y macabro de Dickens viene a ser el modelo en el que se basa Arlt para retratar el Buenos Aires de su época. (38)
>
> [It is in Dickens's novels where Arlt "learns to see" his city's picturesque figures, the unfortunates that break their backs for a few pennies and the tremendous loners that shrink from human contact. Arlt comes to rely on the Dickens model of mysterious and macabre London in portraying the Buenos Aires of his epoch.]

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Certainly, each novelist was fascinated by his city's most marginalized members and portrayed them with an unflinching accuracy that titillated and troubled readers. Whereas the two narrators share discursive habits, Dickens's Pip remains a mild-mannered precursor to Arlt's radicalized Silvio of the twentieth century. Notwithstanding that difference, both protagonists show narration to be intrinsic to plot and ultimately a redemptive act, and therein lies the lasting affinity between *Great Expectations* and *Mad Toy*.

APPENDIX

Mad Toy: a hypothetical chronology

1. Events before the novel opens

1897–98: Birth of protagonist/narrator Silvio Drodman Astier, deduced from the fact that he is 14 at the story's opening: "Cuando tenía catorce años me inició en los deleites y afanes de la literatura bandoleresca un viejo zapatero" (87; ch. 1) [When I was 14, an old shoemaker initiated me in the pleasures and passions of bandit literature].

1911–12: Silvio's childhood friend Enrique Irzubeta falsifies the Nicaraguan flag to win a contest, "por los tiempos en que el esforzado Bonnot y el valerosísimo Valet [sic] aterrorizaban a París" (91; ch. 1) [in those times when brave Bonnot and heroic Valet terrorized Paris]. Jules Bonnot and René Vallet were killed by police in separate actions during April and May of 1912. The reign of terror transpired during the months immediately prior to their deaths. Graphic photos and reportage of the twin sieges are included, respectively, in "Francia.—La muerte del bandido Bonnot" [France.—The death of the bandit Bonnot] and "De Francia.—El fin de una banda de apaches" [From France.—A band of Apaches meets its end] in *Fray Mocho*. Buenos Aires: Year 1, No. 5, May 31, 1912 and No. 7, June 14, 1912. No pagination.

2. The novel opens

1911–12: The library heist occurs soon after the book's opening. During that event Enrique shouts, "Bonnot desde el infierno debe aplaudirnos" (111; ch. 1) [Bonnot must be applauding us from hell]. Therefore, the novel cannot begin much before April 28, 1912, the date of Bonnot's death.

The following citation provides another time marker:

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> Decíame Enrique con motivo de una expulsión de apaches emigrados de Francia a Buenos Aires, y que Soiza Reilly había reporteado, acompañando el artículo de elocuentes fotografías:
>
> —El Presidente de la República tiene cuatro "apaches" que le cuidan las espaldas. (97; ch. 1)

> [On the topic of expelled Apaches, emigrated from France to Buenos Aires, as reported by Soiza Reilly in an article accompanied by eloquent photographs, Enrique was telling me:
>
> —The President of the Republic has four "apaches" that watch his back]

Whereas Enrique probably exaggerates about the presidential bodyguards, Soiza Reilly did publish an entertaining article titled "Los Apaches: Buenos Aires tenebroso" [Apaches: Shadowy Buenos Aires] with dramatic photos and illustrations in the newly inaugurated Fray *Mocho*. Buenos Aires: Year 1, May 17, 1912, No. 3., no pagination.] This Soiza Reilly story gets mentioned in *Mad Toy* just before Silvio and Enrique form their band of thieves. Other references to the Apaches come during the library heist: "[Vivan los apaches Lacombe and Valet! [sic]" (111; ch. 1) [Long live the apaches Lacombe and Valet!] and "un cinematográfico gesto de apache" (115; ch. 1) [a cinematic, apache-like gesture].

3. The novel's extension

If the novel begins in 1911–12, then the final chapter likely takes place between 1914–17 because Silvio has aged at least three years during the course of the book—he is 14 in chapter one, 15 in chapter two, 16 in chapter three, and it seems a fair guess, taking into consideration *Mad Toy*'s pacing, that he would be 17 in the fourth and final chapter. Enrique also ages approximately four years during the story. It is revealed in chapter one that "tenía catorce años cuando engañó al fabricante de una fábrica de caramelos" (89; ch. 1) [he was fourteen when he swindled a candy factory], an event that slightly precedes the book's opening scene. And in chapter four, Enrique remains "menor de edad" (202; ch. 4) [a minor].

The boys' ages accord with another key temporal marker in chapter four, the eviction of the Irzubetas. It was stated in chapter one that "Los Irzubeta eran parientes de jueces rancios y otras gentes de la misma calaña del partido conservador, por cuya razón se sabían inamovibles" (95; ch. 1) [The Irzubetas were related to corrupt judges and other persons of the same ilk from the conservative party, and so they knew themselves to be unbootable]. Lucio remarks in chapter four that the Irzubeta family has been evicted, probably marking

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the conservative party's defeat in the 1916 elections: "Después que nos separamos supe que Grenuillet los pudo desalojar y que se fueron a vivir a Villa del Parque" (200; ch. 4) [After we [the young thieves] split up I learned that Grenuillet [the landlord] was able to dislodge them [the Irzubetas] and that they went to live in Villa del Parque].

4. *Corroborative time markers*

Lyda Borelli, a popular Italian silent film star in vogue during the teens, is mentioned in chapter one: "Sobre la cabecera del lecho extendía sus retorcidos brazos piadosos un Cristo Negro, y en un marco, en actitud dolorosísima, miraba al cielo raso un cromo de Lida [sic] Borelli" (121; ch. 1) [Above the bed's headboard, a Black Christ piously extended his twisted arms, and in a frame, in a pose of absolute suffering, a color photograph of Lida Borelli gazed toward the ceiling]. A similar, or perhaps the same, photo from the epoch (*El Hogar*, XIV, Buenos Aires: August 24, 1917, No. 412) shows her in side profile, faraway eyes, curly hair bound by a headband and adorned with a feather, huge earrings and necklace, and gauzy sleeves. She was introduced to the River Plate public at least by August 21, 1914, when her publicity still appeared in *Fray Mocho* (Buenos Aires: Year 3. No. 121) accompanying a very positive review of her starring performance in *La mujer desnuda* [*The Naked Woman*], a movie that opened the following night at the Empire Theatre.

The unnamed movie theater (131–32; ch. 2) located next to Dardo Rocha's house and opposite the antiquarian bookstore on Lavalle street, is probably the Majestic, which held 900 spectators and was one of 98 movie theaters in Buenos Aires in 1914. (see Andrés Carretero's *Vida Cotidiana en Buenos Aires: Desde la organización nacional hasta el gobierno de Hipólito Yrigoyen (1864–1918)* [*Daily Life in Buenos Aires: From National Organization until the Government of Hipólito Yrigoyen (1864–1918)*], Buenos Aires: Planeta, 2000, 136.)

Silvio describes being on the "Paseo de Julio" (190; ch. 3). This street was renamed Leandro N. Alem in 1919 (see *La Prensa*, Buenos Aires, December 15, 1963), although it is likely that the old name continued to be used unofficially for some years more.

Silvio also recounts "me dirigí a los diques" (190; ch. 3) [I headed toward the docks]. He hopes to board a Europe-bound boat at Puerto Madero. Although that port was being phased our during the 20s, it remained operational in some capacity at least until July 13, 1926, for Arlt writes in an article titled "Episodios tranviarios (Streetcar Episodes) in *Don Goyo*, "Yo trabajo en el puerto.... De Plaza de Mayo al dique Uno hay exactamente doce cuadras" [I work in the port... There are exactly twelve blocks between May Square and

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Dike One], (*El resorte secreto y otras páginas*. Prolog, Guillermo García. Compiler and editor, Gastón Gallo Buenos Aires: Ediciones Simurg, 1996, 101).

Rengo says: "Allí los que saben bailar el tango se casan con millonarias...y yo me voy a ir, Rubio, me voy a ir" (221; ch. 4) [Over there, guys that can dance tango marry dames worth millions...and I'm goin', Blondie, I'm gonna go]. Nelson Bayardo writes that while it is difficult to pinpoint when the tango arrived in Paris, "resulta indiscutible que el auge del fenómeno tanguero en la capital francesa tuvo lugar en el momento que antecede a la primera guerra mundial, entre 1912 y 1913, o sea, ya hacia el final de la Belle Époque" (137–38) [Unquestionably, the tango phenomenon reached its apogee between 1912 and 1913, before World War I, or roundabout the close of the Belle Époche]. Many Argentines made a living in Paris as tango teachers, although it was not the gold mine that it seemed. Bayardo chronicles:

> Fue así que proliferaron los *profesores de tango* en la capital francesa, tanto que la competencia transformó el trabajo en negocio ruinoso y muchos debieron volverse, lo que no impidió que continuara la *tangomanía* con su *hora tango*, *falda tango* y hasta *color tango*. (original italics, 140)

> Thus, *tango professors* proliferated in the French capital, so much so that competition transformed the job into a ruinous business and many [Argentines] had to return, which did not impede the ongoing *tangomania* with its *tango hour*, *tango skirt*, and even *tango color*.

In any case, it is difficult to imagine Rengo—lame as his name implies—in that role.

The Aviation Academy at Palomar de Caseros (163; ch. 2) was founded in 1912.

The line "[Ah! Si yo hubiera podido decirte lo que te quería, así con la música del 'Kiss-me'" (original ellipses, 108; ch. 1) ["Oh! If I could have told you that I loved you, like in the music '*Kiss-Me*'"] probably alludes to Irving Berlin's song *Kiss Me My Honey, Kiss Me*, released on August 3, 1910, with the chorus: "Kiss me my honey, kiss me/ And say you'll miss me as I miss you."

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NOTES

[1] All translations herein are mine. A version of this paper was delivered at the "Dickens en América/Dickens in Latin America" Conference, 23–25 June 2003, School of Humanities and Educational Sciences, University of Uruguay, Montevideo.

[2] Rimmon-Kenan calculates a chronology different from that given by Paroissien: "The distance between the narration and the events varies from text to text: around fifteen years in *Great Expectations*" (89).

[3] Or, if one chooses to go down the perilous path of associating narrators' lives with their nominal authors, it could be relevant that Arlt (1900–42) is 26 when *Mad Toy* appears, making him about the same age as his protagonist Silvio. Dickens (1812–70), on the other hand, is 49 at the final installment of *Great Expectations*, a decade and a half younger than the narrating Pip.

[4] For a discussion of Arlt's anarchist fiction as part of a global movement, see Glen S. Close's *La imprenta enterrada: Baroja, Arlt y el imaginario anarquista* [*The Buried Press: Baroja, Arlt and the Anarchist Imaginary*].

[5] Genette explains: "The speed of a narrative will be defined by the relationship between a duration (that of the story, measured in seconds, minutes, hours, days, months, and years) and a length (that of the text, measured in lines and in pages)" (original parentheses, 87–88). He goes on to say, "Theoretically, indeed, there exists a continuous gradation from the infinite speed of ellipsis, where a nonexistent section of narrative corresponds to some duration of story, on up to the absolute slowness of descriptive pause, where some section of narrative discourse corresponds to a nonexistent diegetic duration" (93–94). He clarifies in a footnote: "The fact that a section of discourse corresponds to no duration in the story does not in itself characterize description: it may also characterize those commentarial excursuses in the present tense which, ever since [Georges] Blin and [Victor] Brombert, we have generally called *author's intrusions or interventions*" (footnote #12, original italics, 94).

[6] Rocambole is the creation of Pierre Alexis Ponson du Terrail (1829–71). The stories appeared as serialized newspaper fiction in France, and by the turn of the century were widely available in Spanish. Typically, Rocambole employs wit, charm, nerve, dueling prowess and a gamut of disguises and accents to infiltrate and swindle French society. Silvio says early in *Mad Toy*, "Yo ya había leído los cuarenta y tantos tomos que el vizconde de Ponson du Terrail escribiera acerca del hijo adoptivo de mamá Fipart, el admirable Rocambole, y aspiraba a ser un bandido de la alta escuela" (91; ch. 1) [I had already read the forty odd volumes that Viscount Ponson du Terrail wrote about Mama Fipart's adoptive son, the admirable Rocambole, and I aspired to be a bandit of the highest rank].

[7] During the library heist, Silvio reads several verses (117; ch. 1) aloud to his companions from Charles Baudelaire (1821–67)'s emotive *Les Fleurs du Mal* (1857).

[8] Compiler Daniel Scroggins provides contradictory titles and dates for that Dickens-allusive column. He cites it as "Música y poesías" ["Music and Poetry"] (35) and as "La filosofía del hombre que riega la huerta" [The Philosophy of the Man Who Waters His Garden] (60), both November 2, 1928; whereas in an appendix, he has "The Philosophy

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of the Man Who Waters His Garden" from November 2 and "Music and Poetry" from November 3 that same year.

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